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Andropov: power without ideology

By VLADIMIR SOLOVYOV
and ELENA KLEPIKOVA

TO LOOK for a liberal in the Kremlin merely because he speaks English, likes jazz and drinks Scotch instead of vodka is to engage in an even vainer pursuit than that of Diogenes. There is a much more reliable way of predicting Yuri Andropov's behavior in his position as head of the state: his behavior as chief of the KGB.

The main thing that Andropov managed to accomplish while he was chief of the KGB was to achieve for his organization the status of a "state within a state"—something it had had only under Stalin when it was outside of Communist Party control and was, in fact, above the party.

While Brezhnev was still alive, at a time when the Politburo was transformed into an almshouse, the center of power was shifted from the Central Committee to the KGB. It is precisely for that reason that the last years of the Brezhnev era differed so sharply from the period when he himself, and not Andropov behind his back, was ruling the country:

There was the beginning of détente and then its inglorious end; the flourishing of dissent and its complete rout; the permitting of Jewish emigration and its gradual stifling under pressure from the authorities; the relative restraint in Soviet expansion and its new phase with the annexation of Afghanistan.

It is the only explanation for the ease and rapidity with which the head of the secret police became the head of the state. What took place in the Kremlin immediately after Brezhnev's death must be regarded as a strictly formal process—an inauguration. The former KGB chief sim-

ply dictated his will to the weakened and frightened Central Committee.

Thus, to expect any change in Kremlin policy because of Andropov's self-appointment is simply absurd. The roots of the regime now established in Moscow are to be sought in the last years of the illusory Brezhnev government.

The dying Brezhnev was a convenient screen for the Russian Riche-lieu. But it seems that toward the end he began to show signs of impatience. In Moscow they were even joking that Andropov didn't replace Brezhnev's pacemaker in time. The KGB chief had dossiers on all his competitors. He arrested friends of Brezhnev's daughter. And a Brezhnev relative, Gen. Semyon Tsvigun, who was assigned to Andropov as a deputy but who was actually keeping an eye on him and tried to prevent the arrest, was found in his office with a bullet through his head.

The campaign against corruption that Andropov has now announced is a continuation of the military and police palace revolution launched while Brezhnev was still alive. Essentially, it is a struggle against competitors, a battle between the KGB and the party. In this struggle, Andropov is assured of the support of the masses who see the party bureaucrats as parasites and the former head of the secret police as a strong man capable of establishing order in the country, since they view Stalinism as a panacea for all the diseases afflicting the world's last empire.

Thus, the closing down of the Central Committee's snack bars, the arrest of the director of the main Moscow delicatessen center and the appearance in shops of fresh vegetables, meat and even Rubik's cube probably represent not so much a concern for the workers as a bid for popularity among them — the new Russian ruler's bread and circuses.

At the same time Andropov is appointing his proteges to high government posts. His former deputy, Victor Chebrykov, has become head of the KGB. Vitaly Fedorchuk, former head of the Ukrainian secret police, has become minister of internal affairs. And the former chief of the Azerbaijan KGB, Geidar Aliyev, has become deputy chairman of the USSR Council of Ministers. All three began their careers in the secret police back in the days of Stalin. This is surely a direct challenge to the Moscow party bureaucrat.

FOR THE FIRST TIME in Soviet history there is now being established in Moscow a regime without an ideology. Even Stalin had to use ideological themes as a cover for his reign of terror. And Brezhnev needed the Potemkinesque ideology of Communism to cover up the concrete of his bureaucratic structure. But now an end is coming to this Orwellian masquerade. Power no longer pretends to be anything else. On that basis alone, one can expect that it will be a structure that will be harsher at home and more aggressive abroad.

(The writers, both Russian-born, have just completed a book, "Russian Paradoxes.")